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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic and on the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request of the Security Council contained in the statement issued by its President on 26 September 2001 (S/PRST/2001/25), in which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed of the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA) and the situation in that country.

2. The report builds on my previous report (S/2011/739), dated 28 November 2011, and provides an update on developments in political, security, socioeconomic, humanitarian, human rights, child protection and gender issues and on the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA), which replaced BONUCA in January 2010.

II. Political situation

3. During the reporting period, the national authorities launched a political dialogue with political parties and civil society organizations on electoral reforms. In November 2011, they held an initial consultation with the participation of political parties from both the ruling party and the opposition, in addition to relevant civil society organizations, to introduce the proposed electoral code and national mechanism for the conduct of elections in the country.

4. During the second consultation, in January 2012, the participants discussed the Government's vision for the electoral process. This included the proposed creation of a national agency for elections to supervise the organization of elections under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, and a consultative committee that would observe elections. The civil society organizations expressed a preference for the establishment of a national authority for elections that would be independent of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization and tasked with administering the entire electoral process. Similarly, political parties, including the ruling Kwa Na Kwa

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(KNK) party, suggested that elections should be organized by a permanent independent electoral commission. The participants were unable to reach consensus.

5. On 18 January, the country's political parties, including KNK, issued a statement calling for a third consultation to harmonize views and complete the review of the proposed electoral reforms. The workshop has not yet taken place. On 1 March, the Speaker of the National Assembly announced that a bill on the electoral code had been presented for consideration. That announcement triggered protests from the Front pour l'annulation et la reprise des elections (FARE), which requested the withdrawal of the bill. After having been analysed by the Committee on the Interior, Laws and Administrative Affairs of the National Assembly, the bill was returned to the Government at the end of April. This demonstrated a level of independence of the National Assembly, its near domination by the ruling KNK party notwithstanding. My Special Representative continues to encourage the Government and all relevant stakeholders to reach consensus on the electoral reform proposals.

6. On 6 January, the criminal investigation unit, or "Service de recherche et d'investigation", arrested the leaders of four politico-military movements involved in the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. Jean-Jacques Demafouth, President of the Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie (APRD) and Vice-President of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Steering Committee, Herbert Gontran Djono Ahaba, Member of Parliament and leader of the Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement (UFDR), Mahamat Abrass, from the same movement and a former Member of Parliament, and Abdel Kader Kalil, also from UFDR and a member of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Steering Committee, were all accused of conspiring against national security.

7. Both APRD and UFDR rejected the charges against the detainees, while remaining committed to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. On 11 April, Mr. Demafouth and the three UFDR leaders were released on bail.

III. Support for national mediation efforts

8. BINUCA continued to support national efforts towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts between the Government and opposition parties and among the politico-military groups. More specifically, BINUCA is working to strengthen the capacity of the National Council for Mediation to manage conflicts at the national level, and to encourage dispute resolution at the local level. Its constitutional mandate to address military, political, economic and social disputes notwithstanding, the National Council is poorly resourced and ineffective. With support from BINUCA, it has begun to establish local mediation councils, a move that will strengthen the deployment of local Government officials and is already proving effective in most parts of the country.

9. The Central African Republic witnessed increased tension between the Muslim community, especially of Chadian descent, and local communities, in particular following the joint Central African/Chadian offensive against the Front populaire pour le redressement (FPR) in January 2012. BINUCA is working with the National Council to put in place appropriate early-warning and mediation mechanisms to address these problems.

IV. Security situation

10. The security situation improved in many parts of the country during the period under review. Confidence increased between UFDR and the Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (CPJP) following the signature of the October 2011 ceasefire agreement. In addition, UFDR and CPJP leaders participated in a peace and reconciliation caravan, along with 25,000 people. The caravan was organized in November 2011 by the country's National Mediator, with support from BINUCA. Consequently, many internally displaced persons who had fled as a result of clashes between the two armed groups were able to return to Bria, Haute-Kotto. Furthermore, as a result of the February deployment of the tripartite Central African/Chadian/Sudanese forces in the north-east, many internally displaced persons returned to Birao, Vakaga. Lastly, the situation in the north-west improved following the beginning of the disarmament and demobilization of former APRD combatants in June 2011, and stabilized during the reporting period. The perceived improvement in the security situation is resulting in a renewed effort to support a disarmament and demobilization campaign in the north-west, and for the necessary steps to be taken to launch the process in other areas, including the north-east.

11. Although the security situation improved in many parts of the country, two foreign armed groups continue to operate in the Central African Republic: FPR and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). These groups pose a serious threat to the continuing stabilization efforts.

12. On 23 January, a military strike was launched by the Central African Republic and Chad against the FPR positions in the prefecture of Nana-Gribizi. The operation followed the decision taken at the fifteenth ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States, held in N'Djamena on 15 January, to help the authorities of the Central African Republic to address pressing security challenges. The operation destroyed the FPR command centre in Ouandago. Consequently, the Central African authorities announced that FPR was no longer a threat to the country, and the Chadian troops withdrew from the Central African Republic on 6 February. The military action did not completely eliminate the FPR threat, however, as the FPR leader was not captured and some elements of the armed group continued attacking Government forces and civilians in neighbouring prefectures.

13. There was also an increase in LRA attacks in the Central African Republic, beginning in the first quarter of 2012, with a spike in March. LRA remains active in Zémio, Rafaï, Obo and Bambouti. To date, 20 attacks, six deaths and 39 abductions have been reported, as compared to 24 attacks in 2011 that resulted in six fatalities and 48 abductions. As at 31 March, 20,362 LRA-induced internally displaced persons and 5,361 Congolese refugees remained displaced within the prefectures of Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou.

14. There is renewed momentum in national, regional and international efforts to counter the LRA threat, which has raised awareness of the operational needs and capacity of the Central African Armed Forces. The United States of America recently deployed 100 military advisers to the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Uganda to provide logistics and training support to national armies in the four affected countries that are carrying out operations against LRA.

15. BINUCA is also participating in the elaboration of a regional strategy to counter the LRA threat being developed by the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), in collaboration with LRA-affected countries, the African Union and United Nations presences in LRA-affected countries and other stakeholders, in accordance with the statement issued by the President of the Security Council on 14 November (PRST/2011/21). Lastly, the Special Envoy of the African Union for the LRA issue and my Special Representative for Central Africa and head of UNOCA visited the Central African Republic in April. They helped to enhance awareness of the resource limitations of the Central African armed forces and of the need to allocate necessary resources to deal with LRA, among many other competing priorities.

16. In response to the LRA threat, BINUCA formulated a multi-pronged strategy in line with national, regional and international efforts in this regard. In addition to its participation in the elaboration of the regional LRA strategy developed by UNOCA, BINUCA is assisting the Government in improving its communication system to increase its early-warning capacity by replicating the existing early warning system developed by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. BINUCA is also working with national and international partners to develop and implement a strategy to encourage the defection of LRA fighters and a policy for their repatriation. Furthermore, BINUCA is facilitating the development of a national disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration strategy in the LRA-affected areas of the country, in addition to deploying two staff members to Obo as part of the Joint Intelligence and Operations Centre.

17. Lastly, during the period under review, casualties that may have resulted from the conflict between the Sudan and South Sudan were reported in the Central African Republic. On 18 April, 11 Central African soldiers were killed and 7 wounded when a contingent of the tripartite Central African/Chadian/Sudanese force was attacked at its base by Sudanese rebels. The base is located at Am Dafock, one half of which is in the Central African Republic and the other in the Sudan.

V. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

18. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration exercise in the north-west and central-north regions was suspended in September 2011 after approximately 4,800 APRD combatants had been disarmed. More than 90 per cent of those demobilized ex-combatants have returned to their communities of origin and are awaiting reintegration opportunities, while the remainder have resettled in urban areas. The United Nations, in liaison with local authorities, continues to maintain contact with the demobilized fighters, including by maintaining a comprehensive database containing, among other things, their geographical location.

19. This disarmament, demobilization and reintegration exercise has led to raised expectations in relation to other politico-military groups. Indeed, all Central African armed groups, including CPJP, which has yet to sign the 2008 Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement, have officially ceased all hostilities and await the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

20. To maintain the current momentum for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the Central African authorities contributed $404,000 to facilitate the

immediate resumption of the disarmament and demobilization operations. These operations resumed on 7 May for the remaining caseload of approximately 1,800 APRD, Union des forces de la résistance (UFR) and Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain (FDPC) combatants in the north-west and central-north areas of the country. This phase of the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process was completed on 18 May for APDR and UFR.

21. Meanwhile, the follow-up committee for the peace accord signed on 8 October 2011 between CPJP and UFDR remained in existence during the reporting period. Verification missions were deployed to Bria and Ndelé from 18 to 25 April, with the substantive and logistical support of BINUCA, to monitor compliance with the ceasefire agreement.

22. In April, the Central African Republic received $2.39 million from the Immediate Response Facility of the Peacebuilding Fund to implement the initial phase of the reinsertion and reintegration programme for demobilized ex-combatants in the north-west and north-central areas of the country. The project will be implemented with the technical assistance of BINUCA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and in close partnership with the World Bank, which will provide three experts to assist with the process. The World Food Programme (WFP) will also provide food rations to ex-combatants and communities. The official launch of the reinsertion phase is scheduled to take place before the end of June. The reinsertion programme will help to promote social cohesion and facilitate economic development for both ex-combatants and communities.

23. In anticipation of the launch of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in the north-east, combatants are now voluntarily disarming. For example, on 14 March, 33 CPJP fighters left their group and presented themselves to the civilian and military authorities in Bria for voluntary disarmament. During the same period, some 30 FDPC combatants contacted the commanding officer of the army contingent in Kabo, Nana-Gribizi, requesting assistance to return to civilian life. Owing to lack of funds and the onset of the rainy season, however, the prospects of launching the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in this region are currently extremely slim.

24. Unfortunately, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme continues to face a lack of funds. The Government has to date spent $9 million on this programme, including for the establishment of a ministry of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, in addition to the payment of stipends to the politico-military groups that signed the 2008 Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The total funding required to complete the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme throughout the entire country is $19,665,916, including $2,683,246 for disarmament and demobilization operations and $17,982,670 for reinsertion and reintegration.

25. On 5 April, the Government convened, with the assistance of the United Nations, a meeting of friends of the Central African Republic in New York to provide an overview of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process and seek financial support from its partners. The meeting afforded an opportunity for the Prime Minister, Faustin Archange Touadéra, and the ministers for defence and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to highlight the security challenges facing the Central African Republic, the efforts made by its authorities to

consolidate peace and the commitment of all the politico-military groups to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and to plead for urgent support to complete the process. The Government of Australia pledged $200,000 for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process during the meeting.

VI. Security sector reform

26. In February, the national Security Sector Reform Steering Committee chaired by the Minister for Defence approved a revised road map for the elaboration of a national security sector reform strategy. The road map, developed with technical support from BINUCA, envisages the elaboration of six subsectoral strategies that will be consolidated into a three-year national security sector reform strategy. These six subsectors are based on the vision of the security sector articulated by the Central African authorities during the April 2008 national security sector reform seminar and focus on the following themes: the armed forces and the gendarmerie; the police; the justice sector; decentralization and environmental protection; public finance and Customs; and democratic control of the security sector. The subsectoral strategy on democratic control, which was completed by the Government with support from BINUCA in January 2011, will be reviewed and updated.

27. Since February, BINUCA, with the support of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Office to the African Union, has made progress in supporting the Government in the development of the security sector reform subsectoral strategies. Experts from the Security Sector Reform Unit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Office to the African Union security sector reform capacity co-deployed to Bangui to assist with the development of the substrategy on the police, which will be finalized soon, and the creation of linkages with other partners, including the African Union. BINUCA and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are also leveraging technical support and funding from Member States to deploy additional expertise to support the development of the overall strategy. For example, with the support of the Government of France, BINUCA is currently facilitating the development of the subsectoral strategy on the armed forces and the gendarmerie. This national security sector reform strategy, which is essential for the legitimacy, sustainability and reinvigoration of national ownership of the security sector reform process in the Central African Republic, may also be a useful tool with which to re-engage international partners in this vital area.

28. In addition to supporting this important strategy, BINUCA provided operational support for the implementation of key security sector reform activities. In this regard, as part of its security sector reform awareness-raising strategy, BINUCA conducted a three-day workshop giving an introduction to security sector reform at the School for Senior Police Officers, at the request of the Minister for Public Security. BINUCA also provided technical assistance in national security sector reform efforts, such as advice on the development of a new statute on the municipal police; support for public outreach on the roles and responsibilities of the municipal police; and training on sexual and gender-based violence and community policing. BINUCA also provided computers to the computer centre of the National Police School, which was inaugurated in November 2011, and technical advice on the national police training curricula.

VII. Socioeconomic situation

29. The second poverty reduction strategy paper was finalized but not formally launched, and national authorities are facing severe funding shortfalls for its implementation. Moreover, the country's economic performance remained below expectations, with a gross domestic product growth rate of 3.1 per cent, compared with 3.3 per cent in 2011. The Government experienced continued budget difficulties, partly owing to slow progress in its discussions with the International Monetary Fund on the correction of slippages in expenditure from previous years, which delayed the disbursement of budgetary support by many international partners.

30. At the beginning of 2012, the Central African authorities enforced the Fund's recommendation and now automatically adjust the prices of petroleum products every month, in order to reflect price increases on the international market and preserve national financial resources. Social tensions arose because of the negative impact of that measure on the prices of basic commodities, including food. Inflation rose from 1.3 per cent in 2011 to 1.4 per cent in January and to 1.6 per cent in February 2012.

31. The human development index increased to 0.343 in 2011, even though the Central African Republic fell two places in the ranking. The country remains among the last eight nations in that ranking, which reflects the deterioration of the main social indicators, except that of education. The country's health system is extremely weak in all its components (management of health-care benefits, funding, human resources, drugs, vaccines, technologies and health information). This weakness is all the more serious since the level of both external and internal funding is insufficient to cover the minimum primary health-care needs. None of the health-related Millennium Development Goals (4, 5 and 6) can be achieved by 2015. It is urgent that national authorities and the international community join forces and take action to resolve this complex health crisis. Of specific concern are the maternal and infant mortality indicators, which are deteriorating dramatically.

VIII. Humanitarian situation

32. In January, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs released a consolidated appeal, requesting $134 million for 1.9 million people in need of assistance. To date, it has received only 26 per cent of the funding required.

33. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued 30,633 birth certificates and 5,607 national identification cards to internally displaced persons and other war-affected people during the period under review. This support will continue, targeting mainly those most discriminated against and those at risk of being stateless. UNHCR is also working with the Government for the application of the cessation clauses of Angolan, Burundian, Liberian and Rwandan refugees. The Central African authorities have agreed to provide alternative status to those who decide to remain in the country, issuing them with a residence permit and/or granting them Central African nationality.

34. Following the restoration of stability in the prefectures of Nana-Mambéré and Ouham-Pendé, UNHCR registered spontaneous returns of refugees who had sought shelter in Cameroon (2,075 individuals, or 566 households) and Chad (6,292

individuals, or 1,220 households). The returnees were provided with seeds by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and food items by WFP. Furthermore, UNHCR is working on a tripartite agreement to repatriate refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who are established in the prefecture of Lobaye. It should be noted that the main challenge impeding the return of refugees and internally displaced persons is the lack of appropriate education and health facilities.

35. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) provided non-food item supplies to 29,000 internally displaced persons to respond to the food crisis in the north, and enabled 158,656 children (70,441 girls and 88,215 boys) to return to school in the conflict-affected regions of the north and the north-east. For its part, WFP provided relief to 14,000 refugees (from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan) and 59,000 internally displaced persons, including victims of conflict in Haute-Kotto, Nana-Gribizi and Ouham-Pendé. Through its emergency school-feeding programme, WFP provided meals to 136,000 primary schoolchildren. Furthermore, it ensured appropriate supplementary feeding for 8,000 malnourished children under 5 years of age, 3,300 pregnant and nursing mothers and 15,000 people living in food-insecure households affected by HIV/AIDS.

36. WFP also continues to operate the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, which enables rapid and secure access for humanitarian agencies to areas that are inaccessible owing to insecurity and poor infrastructure. In this regard, the Air Service flew an average of 103 hours per month, transporting a monthly average of 588 passengers and 8 tons of non-food items.

37. With regard to the health sector, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), Médecins Sans Frontières and Action against Hunger/ACF International, supporting Government partners and communities, organized a coordinated, rapid and effective response to contain the country's first cholera outbreak in 15 years. The intervention ensured that case-fatality rates were controlled following the initial weeks of the outbreak, and prevented a spread to the densely populated capital city of Bangui. In the conflict-affected areas of the north and the north-east, a UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programme provided potable water to 106,000 people, meaning that more than 23,000 internally displaced persons now enjoy access to improved sanitation and washing facilities.

38. Lastly, WHO and UNICEF, in partnership with non-governmental organizations, supported the Central African authorities in organizing three national immunization campaigns against polio in coordination with other countries in Central and West Africa, following the outbreak of the disease in October and November 2011. A total of 800,000 children under the age of 59 months were immunized. Furthermore, during the second week of the African vaccination programme, 62,000 pregnant women and 54,400 children under the age of 11 months were vaccinated.

IX. Operational activities in support of recovery and development

39. During the reporting period, WFP assisted 20,000 people involved in agricultural activities and community rehabilitation projects by providing food aid to protect seed stocks (known as seed protection rations) and through a food-for-

assets project. That support aimed at restoring and improving people's livelihoods in areas recovering from conflict.

40. In late 2011, the Central African authorities began implementing, with technical and financial support from UNDP and FAO, a framework to accelerate the attainment of Millennium Development Goal 1 (c), which aims at reducing by half the percentage of the population suffering from food insecurity. In addition, the process to formulate a national pro-poor growth strategy in agriculture, mines and forests began to lay the foundations for addressing the main national priority of reducing poverty by 2015. Specific attention will be paid to further extending microfinance services to the most vulnerable, following the encouraging results achieved in 2011, when 54,000 people, including 17,000 women, were able to gain access to financial services through financial and technical support provided by UNDP and the United Nations Capital Development Fund. UNDP also continued to provide technical assistance to the national authorities and civil society to implement the first measures taken in respect of climate change and sustainable management of natural resources by the Central African Republic in 2011, when the legal instruments to enforce the Environmental Code were promulgated and the national strategy for reducing greenhouse-gas emissions was approved.

41. UNDP continued to support the Central African authorities in the decentralization process. To strengthen their internal capacity to successfully pilot this process, UNDP, in partnership with the United Nations Capital Development Fund, supported the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization in organizing, from 12 to 14 March 2012, a training session that offered basic tools, knowledge resources and South-South exchange of experiences to increase the effectiveness of staff in fulfilling their missions.

X. Human rights and rule of law

42. During the reporting period, BINUCA noted a surge in reports of human rights violations, including summary executions, torture and arbitrary arrests and detentions perpetrated by Central African security and defence forces, particularly the presidential guards, against the civilian population in legal and sometimes illegal detention cells, in a general culture of custody, detention and imprisonment without trial. BINUCA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have also been particularly concerned about the non-observance of the basic rights of presumed innocence. The prolongation of preventive detention, refusal to grant access to persons arrested and non-compliance with the legal provisions on the duration of custody also remain major challenges in the country. These irregularities weaken and discredit the judicial system, and undermine the Government's credibility in terms of strengthening the rule of law. BINUCA has constantly pressed these concerns with the national authorities, including the Minister for Justice and the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Good Governance, but much remains to be done to observe due process in detention and to prevent illegal arrests and detention. BINUCA thus continued its efforts aimed at coordinating international support for the Government; enhancing exchange of information; identifying gaps, constraints and challenges; and recommending a more coherent and strategic approach to rule of law programming at the national level.

43. BINUCA received several reports of other frequent abuses, including harassment and extortion of the population in areas controlled or dominated by armed groups, such as the prefectures of Haute-Kotto, Kémo, Ouaka, Ouham and Nana-Gribizi. In response to this situation, the population has organized self-defence groups, inadvertently creating problems of human rights abuses. It should be noted that the deployment of self-defence groups by communities in the Central African Republic is common throughout the country and may present new challenges in terms of disarmament and demobilization.

44. Following the joint Central African/Chadian military operation against FPR in January, BINUCA dispatched two human rights teams to the Nana-Gribizi and Bamingui-Bangoran prefectures to assess the situation in those areas. Preliminary analysis of the information gathered revealed both civilian and military casualties; the complete destruction of seven villages, creating a serious humanitarian crisis; the existence of 22,000 internally displaced persons (18,000 have since returned to their communities); harassment of and discrimination against the Muslim population; illegal arrests; torture; and sexual violence, including rape. The final report capturing these preliminary findings, including recommendations, has been shared with the parties.

45. BINUCA also maintained its technical cooperation and capacity-building activities in human rights and rule of law through awareness-raising campaigns, training and assistance with norm-setting. In addition, it supported the United Nations Population Fund in training 34 officers from armed forces in gender-based violence and protection. BINUCA, working in collaboration with the UNDP project for the reinforcement of the legally constituted State, the Danish Refugee Council and the International Criminal Court, contributed to the training of 30 participants from national civil society organizations in court monitoring techniques. The training strengthened their capacity to assess and observe whether the rights of the accused were respected during trials.

46. On the rule of law, the newly built district court of Paoua was handed over to the Ministry of Justice on 24 March. The focus during the reporting period has, however, been on norm-setting, so as to enhance the effectiveness of the Central African criminal justice system, as prioritized in the second poverty reduction strategy paper. Efforts are being made, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and other partners, to enhance the efficiency of the criminal justice system by improving cooperation between the police and the judiciary during arrests and detention, and to limit delays in the administration of justice. In this respect, UNDP has handed over a stock of communication equipment to the Ministry of Security to help improve coordination and communication between central and decentralized services.

47. With regard to the management of prison facilities, food allocation to prisons in the countryside was cancelled at the beginning of 2012 owing to the dire financial situation of the justice administration system. To mitigate the negative impact of this decision on the condition of the prisoners, UNDP provided grain and cassava mills, brick-moulding equipment and agricultural tools to the women's prison in Bimbo and to the prisons in Sibut, Bossangoa and Dekoa, so as to enhance their autonomy and consequently improve the prisoners' basic living conditions. In March 2012, UNDP handed over a cellular van to the Ministry of Justice to enable the transportation of prisoners in more decent conditions.

48. In April, national legislation on the management of the prison system was promulgated by the National Assembly and immediately entered into force, paving the way for the transfer of prison administration and security from military jurisdiction to that of the Ministry of Justice. BINUCA is now contributing to the development of a series of policies and procedures, including standard operating procedures, which conform to applicable international human rights standards.

XI. Child protection

49. The National Assembly ratified the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in December 2011. This constitutes a significant step towards the fulfilment of children's rights. UNICEF and BINUCA began advocating the implementation of the protocols and the adoption of national legislation criminalizing the use of children by armed forces and groups in the country.

50. The signature in 2011 of action plans to end the recruitment and use of children by APRD and CPJP and the reaffirmation of an existing action plan with UFDR notwithstanding, the presence and recruitment of an unknown number of girls and boys continued to be observed among local armed groups, foreign armed groups and self-defence groups. Other grave violations against children were documented during the reporting period.

51. The country task force on the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict had regular contact with the leadership and focal points of CPJP and UFDR to prepare for the implementation of the action plans and the process of releasing children from their ranks. A mapping exercise of the sites where the armed groups are holding children has been conducted, and a list of 106 children established. Initial difficulties notwithstanding, the country task force entered into contact with the APRD military leadership for the designation of two focal points and to establish a committee to oversee the implementation of the action plan. UNICEF and its implementing partners, Cooperazione Internazionale, the Danish Refugee Council and the International Medical Corps, began preparations to provide reintegration assistance to children separated from these armed groups.

52. Joint verification missions were conducted by the country task force in March to Bria, Haute-Kotto, and in April to Ndele, Bamingui-Bangoran, to verify the presence of children within armed groups, to begin negotiations with the commanders of those armed groups so as to list the children associated with them and to initiate discussions with those communities where returning children would be reintegrated.

53. Some 500 children associated with self-defence groups in the prefecture of Ouham-Pendé were reintegrated with the support of UNICEF and the Danish Refugee Council. The children benefited from psychosocial assistance, life-skills training, professional activities and education. Before reintegration, awareness-raising campaigns were carried out at the community level to promote respect for child rights and to ensure that the children were accepted back into the communities. Psychological and psychosocial support for a further 1,340 vulnerable children, including children who had escaped or been rescued from LRA, was provided by implementing partners in LRA-affected areas.

54. Following the entry into force of the Penal Code in January 2011, 90 juvenile justice actors were trained in legal procedures for managing children in conflict situations during preliminary investigations and court proceedings, including alternative measures to detention. During the reporting period, the appropriate authorities addressed cases involving 150 children. A juvenile police brigade and three children's tribunals are now operational in the country. The participation of two trainers from security and defence groups in a regional workshop providing training for law enforcement agents on the rights of the child, held in Niamey in October and November 2011, served to strengthen buy-in for the integration of child rights curricula into standard professional training for security and defence forces.

XII. Gender

55. In December 2011, BINUCA supported a two-day forum to reflect on and identify strategies for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in the Central African Republic. Representatives of BINUCA also attended a special session on sexual and gender-based violence at the fourth ordinary summit of Heads of State of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, held in Kampala from 11 to 16 December 2012. Furthermore, representatives of BINUCA participated in the nineteenth "Gender is my Agenda" campaign pre-summit consultative meeting on gender mainstreaming in the African Union, held in Addis Ababa on 25 and 26 January 2012. Lastly, to reinforce the mechanisms in place and integrate resources in support of the Government's efforts to implement protocols on gender mainstreaming and sexual and gender-based violence, BINUCA also facilitated the participation of women from a Central African civil society organization, Women Forum on Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence, in the meeting.

56. Following deadly clashes between CPJP and UFDR in September 2011, BINUCA, in partnership with the United Nations country team and the Gender Thematic Group undertook a joint evaluation mission to Bria, Haute-Kotto, on 6 March, to consolidate resources for initiatives in response to the needs of women, children and other vulnerable groups. In follow-up, BINUCA conducted a three-day workshop (from 22 to 25 March) for 65 women leaders and women associated with ex-combatants on social cohesion and the contribution of women in the consolidation of peace in Haute-Kotto. Given the ethnic dimension of the conflict, the workshop also provided a forum for the reconciliation of women from the two opposing groups (Goula and Runga).

XIII. Peacebuilding Fund

57. Most projects under the second tranche of funding allocated by the Peacebuilding Fund to the Central African Republic ($20 million) are on track, their slow start-up notwithstanding. Projects are being implemented by the United Nations system organizations and their national partners focusing on three pillars: security sector reform; the promotion of good governance and the rule of law; and the establishment of development hubs and the revitalization of communities after conflict. This second tranche of funding builds on the achievements of the first tranche ($10 million), granted in 2008, which provided critical support to the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups, enhanced access to

justice for women in conflict-affected areas and the delivery of the dividends of peace to young people, in particular.

58. In late 2011, the Peacebuilding Fund provided an additional $2.4 million through its Immediate Response Facility to enable the reinsertion of 4,800 disarmed and demobilized combatants in the north-west of the country. The project is being implemented by BINUCA and UNDP.

59. Almost four years after the launch of the initial projects, a final independent evaluation is to take place in June 2012 to assess the relevance and effectiveness of the Fund's investments in support of peacebuilding efforts in the Central African Republic. The findings of the evaluation will take the form of lessons learned and further inform efforts by the Government, the United Nations system and the international community to mobilize additional resources required to sustain peace consolidation efforts under the framework of the second poverty reduction strategy paper.

XIV. Activities of the Peacebuilding Commission

60. In November 2011, the final review of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic, which expired at the end of 2011, produced a set of conclusions and recommendations on the way forward in the areas of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector reform, the rule of law and good governance, in addition to the development hubs programme (PBC/5/CAF/3). The recommendations were addressed to the Government, the Peacebuilding Commission, civil society organizations and the Peacebuilding Fund Joint Steering Committee.

61. The Peacebuilding Commission is currently redefining its engagement with the Central African Republic so that it is aligned with the country's second poverty reduction strategy paper, which was developed taking into account the country's peacebuilding challenges.

62. As part of its continuing advocacy efforts, in March 2012, the Peacebuilding Commission held a meeting with the participation of the ministers of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, defence and justice, in addition to my Special Representative, to contribute to raising the awareness of partners ahead of the 5 April meeting of the friends of the Central African Republic and to impress upon them the urgency of moving ahead and finalizing the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in the country.

XV. Integration and a common United Nations vision for the Central African Republic

63. BINUCA and the United Nations country team have elaborated a peace consolidation and development assistance framework for the period 2012-2016. The framework articulates the key areas in which BINUCA and the United Nations country team will focus their support to the Central African authorities in advancing the key peace consolidation and poverty reduction issues elaborated in the second poverty reduction strategy paper. As indicated in my previous report, the framework is accompanied by a joint action plan, in addition to a monitoring and evaluation

framework that enables the periodic assessment of progress achieved in delivering on the common outcomes agreed upon by the United Nations system organizations operating in the Central African Republic. This exercise strengthened strategic integration for greater coherence of the United Nations presence in the country. To take this coherence to the programmatic level, BINUCA and the United Nations country team are now focusing attention on selected key short-term peace consolidation and development assistance activities for joint implementation, around which quick outcomes could be realized during the first year of the implementation of the framework.

XVI. Observations and recommendations

64. The Government's initiative to launch an inclusive political dialogue constitutes a major breakthrough, as the Government and opposition parties halted formal contact in late 2010. The initial consultations ended before consensus was reached on the proposed electoral reforms, however. Such a consensus is critical to ensure the smooth conduct of future elections. I therefore urge the Government, the political parties and civil society to resume discussions on electoral reforms with a renewed constructive spirit. A forum for dialogue between the authorities, political parties and civil society organizations could also become a vehicle for regular consultations on social, economic, peace and security issues. The United Nations remains available to support such regular, transparent and open contacts that would contribute to fostering confidence among all national stakeholders.

65. The arrest of the four politico-military leaders and the lapse of time between their arrest, their indictment and their eventual release on bail increased the political tension in the country. It also renewed concerns about respect for the rule of law. Nonetheless, the politico-military leaders remained committed to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. The timely resolution of the legal issues affecting these leaders should help to enhance the smooth conduct of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration operations.

66. The overall security situation in the country has improved, but remains fragile. While in 2011 Government control and access by international organizations could be assured only in the south and north-west, today most of the country has become accessible. Populations have begun returning to the north-east and normal life is gradually resuming. There is increased hope that security will be restored throughout the country. The continued threat to civilian populations posed by foreign armed groups such as LRA and FPR constitutes a cause for serious concern, however.

67. I applaud the continuing fruitful collaboration between the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan, in addition to the regional commitment expressed by the Heads of State of the Economic Community of Central African States, which have contributed to the improved security situation. While the joint military action against the FPR positions has yielded positive results, the search for a political solution should also be pursued. I also urge international partners to provide assistance to the Central African authorities to enable them to implement a robust national response to the LRA threat and to contribute effectively to the regional efforts led by the African Union in this regard.

68. It is important to take advantage of the unprecedented window of opportunity on the security front to implement the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, which has a funding shortfall of some $20 million. The meeting of friends of the Central African Republic held in New York on 5 April to assist resource mobilization efforts for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme was therefore extremely timely. I thank the countries and partners that pledged assistance to the country and urge them to fulfil their promises as soon as possible. The completion of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process would help to consolidate the fragile peace and pave the way for sustained security. It would also alleviate the humanitarian situation of the 1.9 million people in dire need of assistance, and enable the return of durable stability and development. I congratulate the Government, AFDR and UFDR for finalizing the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in the north-west of the country. I encourage the Government to continue to build on the relative peace in most parts of the country to extend its political presence in the regions and position itself to provide social and development assistance to the population living in the interior.

69. Human rights violations committed across the country by defence and security forces are of serious concern. They underscore the urgent need to reform the security sector, which is vital to sustainable peace and stability in the country. I urge the Government to take serious steps to address these issues.

70. The persistence of arbitrary arrests and illegal detention in the Central African Republic undermines the credibility of the authorities and of its judicial institutions. I therefore urge the Government to take urgent and tangible steps to address this problem. In this regard, a constructive dialogue with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, in particular the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, will provide greater confidence in the Government's intent.

71. I welcome the promulgation of the Principles of Penitentiary Administration Act, which should improve access to justice and legal assistance, and enable the establishment of positive working relations between the judicial bodies and the Government.

72. While I am encouraged by the ratification of the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, I remain concerned about the continued commission of grave violations against children by armed groups and self-defence groups in the Central African Republic. I urge all parties to cease the violations immediately, and urge those who have signed action plans in line with Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) to implement them without delay, in collaboration with the United Nations.

73. The entire United Nations system has come together to support the consolidation of peace in the Central African Republic in a more integrated fashion. While I underscore the importance of integration in the field to articulate a common United Nations vision, it should be noted, however, that the lack of resources for the implementation of joint projects continues to be a major constraint that needs to be addressed, so as to move forward the United Nations common agenda in the country. I am particularly concerned about the slow pace of implementation of the health-related Millennium Development Goals. It is critical that the international community join forces to support the efforts of the Government.

74. The Peacebuilding Commission has worked to mobilize critical support for the consolidation of peace in the Central African Republic, led tirelessly by the outgoing Chair of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, Jan Grauls, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations in New York.

75. I should like to express my appreciation to regional and international organizations, including the Economic Community of Central African States, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, the African Union, the European Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie, for their contributions, and to bilateral partners for their continued support to the Central African Republic.

76. Lastly, I should like to commend the staff of BINUCA for their commitment and hard work in a difficult environment under the leadership of my Special Representative, Margaret Aderinsola Vogt, and the United Nations country team for its dedicated and diligent efforts in support of peacebuilding in the Central African Republic.